

III

THE CHOICE OF AN IDEAL¹

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain."—1 CORINTHIANS IX, 24.

THE race of which this text speaks is life, and the prize to which it refers is what we call character—good character—good for something. We are not born with character, any more than we are born with honesty. Character starts as a tendency—like honour it is not spontaneous merit, comes not as a special grant of God to the few favored, but it is yours and mine, as the prize in an obstacle race, if we run well. The hurdles and hills are only meant to try our mettle. Determination, courage, ambition, and faith in God are the unseen spurs which drive us on to victory. We get no help from the cheers of the crowd unless we have done our best. Opportunity, which is that silent God-sent companion accompanying us in every effort at attainment, says none need despair—this is no time for discouragement or pessimism: "though deep in mire, wring not your hands and weep, I lend my arm to all who say I can. No shame-faced outcast ere sank so low but who might rise and be again a man." This race is a marathon, not of miles, but of years—it is not the distance covered, but the goal we seek that is important. Everybody must run in this race; being born is to be entered. Two things above all else are important, the start we get, our preparation and equipment, and the goal

¹ Baccalaureate sermon of the seventh annual commencement of the Rice Institute, preached by Clinton S. Quin, Bishop Coadjutor of Texas, in the academic court, at nine o'clock Sunday morning, June 11, 1922.

we seek. Your education is the chief part of your equipment, but the goal you seek will determine the happiness you get out of life, and the worth-whileness of your having lived here.

You graduates have arrived at commencement time. May I extend you most hearty congratulations. I like to call this commencement rather than graduation, for in our peculiar and distinctive American way, we have allowed the word graduation to convey the impression of a "finish," whereas in reality we have assuredly not finished, but have just begun the race of life, and it is on your commencement that I congratulate you.

There is a certain limited, or if you prefer, extended, knowledge you have acquired in your school and university days, and even though you continue in post-graduate work, it will be a storing up of information about life and its varied expression. What is your education, this knowledge, worth? I do not like the inscription over a column in the Congressional Library, even though it was said by a sage, "knowledge is power," it deceives the intellectual bent; I believe it is misleading. Knowledge is not power, knowledge is powerless unapplied. A man overboard might be an expert in the art of swimming, but knowing how to swim will never save him—it is the applied knowledge. All we know about life is worthless, until we further learn to apply it profitably. All we know about religion will never save us. It is how we use what we know. It is possible for a person to be so excessively scientific that he ceases to be practical. A man hasn't as much religion as he hears—he hasn't as much as he believes—he has no more religion than he actually uses, and so it is with your education, your equipment. Education is a living thing, and living things must grow. Though you have graduated,

you have not attained. Don't mistake the road post for the goal post. Knowledge is useless unless it leads to and out from the Source of all knowledge—it is useless and will fail in its mission. This is the necessity for emphasizing religious education. Unless first we learn to add God to our life, we never rightly learn to add two plus two. Until our education is directed towards a useful, practical purpose, it has only a drugging effect. Education is stagnation without ideal. Where we are going is more important than all we know, and who we are, or what we have. It is to this ideal, among others, which the world sets up as alluring inducements, I wish to point. It has to do with the choice of an ideal.

I suppose that a majority of this graduating body has already definitely decided on what work they are to undertake. I use this word work deliberately, and for two reasons. First, there is an amusing and foolish idea in this world that the man who works only with his brain power, particularly one of the professional class, is not a working man at all. A form of this foolish idea was expressed recently in this city by a special lecturer, who said in the course of a public university extension lecture that "anybody who could choose between being a laboring man and a bishop would choose to be a bishop." That sounds all right, but even that is not true, for I know a good many bishops who would not choose the office. But the lecturer went on to give as a reason for his statement that "a bishop had to make no effort mentally or physically." Now that reason is not true. If it were true of a bishop, it would be equally true of the editor, the lawyer, and the teacher, and on behalf of this class of men and women I resent any such absurd accusation. Then in the second place, I speak of work, because it is the Gospel of salva-

tion for here and hereafter. "Not everyone that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven." "If any man will do my will he shall know." If you have made up your mind not to work, your time and money and energy expended in these years of preparation have been a sinful waste. So I say, you have doubtless decided on a definite kind of work.

It is just here that the world seeks to offer you one of its ideals. It says measure your worth by your money-making ability. Don't you be fooled. The ideal I hold up to you cannot possibly be measured in dollars and cents. It is not money. Money is not the most important thing in the world. We are wont to declare money is power, money is almighty, money can do anything, it is *the* thing of life. That is a lie: nail it early. What good is my education if I cannot make money? It is true that money can make the desert blossom as a rose. By its purchasing power of medical skill it can defy death. With it great buildings go up, schools, hospitals, churches, libraries, philanthropic institutions; but money has its limitations—of itself it is useless, as powerless as knowledge. We say of the pauper the same as we do of the millionaire, when he dies, how much did he leave? He left all he had. Money is powerless apart from personality. There are some things money cannot do.

But we all want it, we need it, it is a human necessity. Of course it is. I am no fanatic counseling intelligent people to try to live without it. But it is generally true that the first consideration of a child's future registers itself in the anxiety as to how a child may make money. Our children are taught faithfully at the mother's knee (I don't know why we say mother's knee, instead of father's,

but we do) to say "Our Father," but long before time for this child to enter the business world it has learned to substitute as of more importance, "give me this day my daily bread." Our children are measured by their money-making power. Now this is why I refer to it: anything which occupies such an important place in life, but which cannot pass the dead line, should certainly be relegated to its proper place in a plan of life. Not what we make in life, but what we make of life. Capital without character is nothing. Education is important, money is important, pleasure and recreation are too—we ought to have these, but unless we can convert them into, or control them by character, they are of themselves deadly possessions.

Then again the world says "Here is something that will interest you"—it is the cheers of the crowd—fame, popularity, notoriety—what the world calls success. The world says, "This is the ideal of life." That is not true, and let's not be easy in our denial. The only real success comes through sacrifice. It is giving, not getting. Hold to this, because you cannot depend upon the world's opinion. The world, even in its heartlessness, pitied the speaker of this text, as he lay in an underground dungeon in the city of Rome. The world pointed to him in his chains, and called him a failure. The world scoffed at a man, then rejoiced at his confinement on the Isle of Patmos—a failure. People mourned and bowed their heads as they looked one day at a man upon a cross—"He saved others, Himself He cannot save"—even His disciples went back to their fishing—His life was a failure. But the world doesn't know. You cannot count on the cheers of the crowd. Paul's failure gave the world the opportunity of Christianity. John's failure has given us not alone the most remarkable book of the whole Bible, but a very gem

in all literature. The failure of Jesus Christ gave a scoffing, unbelieving world its only hope and assurance that death is but a stage in life, an expansion, an extension of life. What the crowd says you cannot depend on. In our race of life what are we doing to make the world a better, fairer place for people to live in—that is the measure. Fame, of itself, is a subtle temptation—there is no sin in the temptation, but temptation is always the danger line. God help us to avoid any such ideal as being at all worth while. It has been well said that “if a man is truly great, no matter what he does or who he is, or where he lives, the world will insist on building a pathway to his door and do him homage.”

To say that character is the ideal of life, the one to seek, to choose, is but saying in less familiar words what Jesus Christ gave as the basis and the rule and the end of all right-living, namely, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Character, good character, good for something, is the only thing under Heaven we may have and keep. It is the only worth while ideal. Like love, it is a living thing, that even death cannot destroy. There is stamped over the door of a German university this significant verse: “When wealth is lost, nothing is lost. When health is lost, something is lost. When character is lost, all is lost.” I would describe character in these words: Character is to be clean, to be square; to have ambition to live and help live, with faith in God, all applied in the service of our fellow men. Strive for it, stand for it, fight for it, die for it if you have to. Take care of what you are, and what you do will care for itself—watch your motives. There is no right character possible without God as the foundation stone—Jesus Christ and His life as the

living expression of it. Religion, I believe, is a necessary element in attainment. Don't despair for fear I am setting up too pious an ideal—there is nothing pious about religion, though some people interpret it so. Religion is not sanctification. What this world needs more than sanctity is sanity in religion—an even balance in religion—an appreciation of God, our Heavenly Father, that will make us love Him, with all our heart—that covers the service we render; with all our soul—that means the worship we owe and do; with all our mind—that means the study we do, and the knowledge we acquire; with all our strength—that means the proper care of the body He gives us. No man can be self-made who has God for his Father. Great people in this world are those who, like St. Paul, are ready to acknowledge that “by the grace of God I am what I am.”

Learn then to value life properly—it is a great thing. You have had an excellent preparation. Value it—add to it—use it. May God help you so to apply what you know that you come to attain His prize in life—the Christian character—that element in constructive citizenship which builds us up loyal to God and country, happy, prosperous, lovable, serviceable members of the human family. So run you that ye may obtain.

If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill,
Be a scrub in the valley—but be
The best little scrub by the side of the rill;
Be a bush if you can't be a tree.

If you can't be a bush be a bit of the grass,
And some highway happier make;
If you can't be a muskie, then just be a bass—
But the liveliest bass in the lake!

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We can't all be captains, we've got to be crew,
There's something for all of us here.
There's big work to do and there's lesser to do,
And the task we must do is the near.

If you can't be a highway then just be a trail,
If you can't be the sun, be a star;
It isn't by size that you win or you fail—
Be the best of whatever you are!

—*Douglas Malloch.*

CLINTON S. QUIN.



